The Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

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Ḥuqúqu'lláh is indeed a great law. It is incumbent upon all to make this offering, because it is the source of grace, abundance, and of all good. It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful.

Dearly loved co-workers of the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh,

This issue of the Newsletter focuses on the important contributions of the institutions of the learned and the rulers to the work of educating the believers in the spiritual significance of this great law of Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, the Universal House of Justice has written,

> *...a healthy and collaborative relationship has been developed with the Continental Boards of Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies, a relationship which is of great importance and has served as the cornerstone for so many heartwarming attainments.*

We hope that when reading these reports you will reflect on and envision how you can collaborate with these institutions and assist the believers to *draw nigh unto such stations as none can comprehend save those whom God hath willed.*

Warmest Bahá'í greetings

International Board of Trustees

Institutional Conference in Canada

The Ḥuqúqu'lláh Institutional Conference was held from 29 September to 1 October 2006 at the Toronto Bahá'í Centre. The theme of the conference was "This Mighty Law, a Source of Inestimable Blessing for All Humanity". All five Deputy Trustees and thirty-one Representatives from across Canada attended, marking the highest level of participation at this kind of conference so far.

The reading of an inspiring and heart-warming message from the Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, opened the conference and set the tone for the entire weekend. Member of the Continental Board of Counsellors Daniel Scott gave a keynote address, excerpts of which will appear in a later edition of the Newsletter.

Conference participants were delighted that Dr. David Smith and Mr. Gordon Naylor, two members of the Canadian National Assembly, attended a session and shared a message from the National Assembly. During the session, Dr. Smith spoke of the need to engage seekers with this mighty law as it is the source of well-being for all mankind, challenging those present to be creative in their presentation of the law with Bahá'ís as well as those investigating the Faith.

The Board of Trustees in Canada conducted a session on the basic elements of the work of the Representatives, explaining that we are involved in a transformation of the individual that is spiritual in nature. For that reason, the visibility of Representatives is very important in assisting Bahá'ís to understand this law. Purity of heart and sincerity were highlighted as important attributes to evince when engaging the friends.

The Representatives shared experiences of what approaches worked and those that were less successful. In this light Ms. Lisa Flynn, an Auxiliary Board member commented that the assistants to the Auxiliary Board members could collaborate and help the Ḥuqúqu'lláh Representatives to reach the clusters throughout Canada. The institutional meeting is another fruitful opportunity to address the topic of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and encourage the friends in their study.

In the open session, the Bahá'ís of Toronto were privileged to listen to a talk by Mr. Douglas Martin, former member of the Universal House of Justice. He poignantly commented that the international community has poured billions of dollars into projects related to social and economic development but that these have been unsuccessful in achieving any real progress. He further explained that the institutions including that of Ḥuqúqu'lláh elevate consciousness in society. It is this dimension which leads to the transformation of the social order.

Session with Counsellor and Auxiliary Board members in Bolivia

The Dorothy Baker Environmental Centre, in the mountains of Cochabamba, was the site for a historic meeting on 26 November 2006 among the newly appointed Bolivian Auxiliary Board members, Deputy Trustee Kelly Clarke Boldt, and Representatives of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Also in attendance was Counsellor Crystal Baker Shoaie who invited the Representatives to present a session on the importance of this law. The participants were encouraged to further deepen in the implications of the Right of God. The Board members responded joyfully to this encouragement and found that the potency of the Writings on Ḥuqúq served as a reminder of its significance.

Following the meeting, the Board of Trustees sent a message thanking Counsellor Shoaie for the opportunity to participate in this initiative, remarking with pleasure that the meeting arose from joint consultation about the mutual responsibilities of the two institutions in educating the friends on the spiritual aspects of the Right of God. As this was a significant step forward in expanding the understanding of the obligation of each believer towards Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Board was confident that the meeting will profoundly impact the spirit which will no doubt animate the believers, the Faith, and no less all humanity when the responsibilities enshrined in the law are faithfully fulfilled.

(Historic meeting between Counsellor Shoaie, newly appointed Bolivian Auxiliary Board members, and the Deputy Trustee and Representatives of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.)

Gathering with "Unified Hearts and Uplifted Spirits"

The Regional Board for the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom met in Bristol on 13 and 14 January 2007. All but one Representative were able to attend what was described as a "truly inspirational weekend". Through a beautifully organized agenda, the gathering was at once relaxed and flexible yet focused and purposeful. Those present shared valuable personal experiences, consulted on joint and individual plans, deepened their understanding of the sacredness of this law, and were able to get clarification on many questions.

(Meeting of Deputy Trustees and Representatives from the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.)

Genuine love for the law and wonder at its implications seemed at all times to characterize the spirit of the consultations and interactions. The workshops centred on the deepening materials prepared by Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri. Storytelling, group consultation, lots of laughter, and sincere fellowship encouraged a greater sense of confidence in the individual capacities of the Deputy Trustees and Representatives and strengthened bonds of friendship and trust. The newly appointed Representatives benefited from the opportunity to ask questions, receive feedback, and connect with other more experienced Representatives.

The success of the weekend was evident in the strong desire by all to render the service of educating others about Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Each participant prepared an action plan for how this love would be translated into action.

Training Workshop in Gabon

Deputy Trustee Rashid Rameshfar held a training session on 20 February 2007 with Dr. Ibrahim Amoussa and Mr. Albert Ngoupoueyou, the two Representatives in Gabon. Letters from the International Board of Trustees and the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh were studied along with key quotations from the Compilation on the Right of God. Five members of the National Assembly, two Auxiliary Board members, the National Institute Director, and cluster coordinators participated in the part of the training workshop which focused on the shared institutional responsibility relating to education on Ḥuqúqu'lláh. An outcome of note was the Auxiliary Board members' plans for deepening their assistants.

Each Representative prepared a personal plan for the coming year and all aspects of receipting and remitting payments were reviewed. Some elements contained in the plans of the Representatives were the following:

- Studying the compilation with Local Spiritual Assemblies, focussing on the educational responsibility of all the institutions
- Organizing meetings with the believers to study the booklet on the Right of God
- Preparing Writings on Ḥuqúqu'lláh for the devotional portion of the Nineteen Day Feast
- Utilizing audio-visual materials
- Reciting the prayer for Ḥuqúqu'lláh daily
- Incorporating a Ḥuqúqu'lláh presentation into the National Convention and other activities at the national level, including the National Newsletter

Mr. Rameshfar reflected that as each Representative becomes more familiar with the administrative responsibilities and sees the necessity of drawing up annual plans of action, the community benefits, in a variety of ways, from the Representatives' greater awareness of the importance of the law. This was seen to happen in the sessions and workshops.

(Gabon training session with Deputy Mr. Rashid Rameshfar.)

The Autumn Meeting, a Tradition

The "autumn meeting" has proven to be an inspiring tradition among the ten countries—Austria, Belarus, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Moldova, Switzerland, and the Ukraine—all of which fall under the Central European Board's jurisdiction.

The meeting is an opportunity for Deputies to have a question and answer session and to receive detailed updates about new developments. It is also an opportunity to learn from each other and share experiences that can be utilized in countries where social or demographic similarities exist.

("Autumn meeting" of Deputy Trustees and Representatives.)

The following comment "together we find new solutions and return to our work with new energy, courage and personal plans" characterizes the sense of accomplishment of the meeting.

Mrs. Kerstin Poschmann, Secretary of the Board, reported that "the friends are always excited after such meetings and take a new understanding with them. We were astonished to realize that some believers from long-standing Bahá'í families still need further deepening. For recently declared believers, everything is new, and they are grateful to learn more about the development of the Right of God. They often clearly see the spiritual meaning and the greatness of this law and want to obey it as accurately as possible."

She further commented that it has also become clear how important it is for all community members to know the names of those who are serving the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and to whom they can turn for advice. This can be achieved by their active participation in all kinds of gatherings and by using the many opportunities available to Representatives to talk about the Right of God.

Mrs. Poschmann also made extensive travels through Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and the Ukraine during 2006, meeting with Counsellors, National Assemblies, and Auxiliary Board members as well as attending conferences and educational sessions with the Deputy Trustees, Representatives, and the believers.

Regional Focus

The following three articles feature Ḥuqúqu'lláh conferences, part or all of which were open to the entire community. In this way the believers have the opportunity to meet the Deputy Trustees and Representatives and to learn first-hand about the work they do.

Focus on Fund Management in the Caribbean

The Caribbean Ḥuqúqu'lláh Conference is held annually and open to all community members. This year it was held in Jamaica in October 2006.

In addition to the believers who participated in the conference, a total of forty-one institutional members attended from 15 countries in the Caribbean. The spirit of love and unity which characterizes these conferences was once again felt by all. Having two Counsellors from the region present for the whole conference was a source of great joy.

The participants greatly appreciated the stirring message from Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá. Following the message from Dr. Varqá, Counsellor Deborah Kirton gave an enlightening and inspiring talk that set the tone for the conference, entitled "Attracting the Hearts of the Believers to Obedience to the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh". All Deputy Trustees made presentations during the conference.

Mrs. Marcia Stabler facilitated a session on "Handling and Management of Funds" which focused on the manner in which the funds are receipted and remitted to the Centre of the Cause and the attention and care given to that process.

(Participants attending the Caribbean conference.)

Mr. Denis Anderson held a workshop session on the "Role of the Institutions in the Education of Ḥuqúqu'lláh"; members of the other institutions participated and gained an appreciation of their role in the educational process of their communities.

Miss Deborah Eckert brought alive the idea of "being and doing" with her insight into many quotations from the Writings and other sources. This talk helped all to see that no one law can be seen in isolation from the others and that an awareness of each law is essential for our spiritual lives as it leads to action.

Miss Darlene Hodge conducted a reflective exercise followed by a group discussion on some of the attitudes and virtues necessary to help individuals attain their hearts' desire, which is to faithfully obey the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

Mr. John Currelly helped the friends develop new and creative ideas for the education of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, which formed the basis of action plans for each country.

In the evening the conference attendees were treated to a wonderful cultural exchange of music, poetry, storytelling, and song.

During the conference, the Board met with the National Assembly of Jamaica and with seven Representatives for the purpose of deepening, sharing with them its goals, and answering their questions. The newly appointed Representatives appreciated this important meeting to share their ideas with the Board. In light of all the guidance from the Bahá'í World Centre, their responsibility as primarily one of education was stressed.

A First for Finland

A decision was made, through inter-institutional collaboration, to hold a Ḥuqúqu'lláh conference in Helsinki in January 2007. This was a historic event for the Finnish Bahá'í community, as it was its first national conference concerning Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Great efforts were made to inform the friends about the conference at both the national and local levels through a variety of means. At the local level, assistants to Auxiliary Board members encouraged the friends to participate.

Increasingly, an intergenerational mix of participants at national events is being sought. A high-

light was the participation of four youth from different parts of Finland who joined the other twenty participants. These youth brought a special spirit to the conference and contributed noticeably to the discussions.

The first day of the conference was in the Finnish language and the second day in Persian. The organizers found it very effective to use the set of materials developed by Dr. Javaheri, which had recently been translated into Finnish. Participants appreciated the interactive style cultivated through small group sessions.

Some key concepts explored were the nature of the law, on a very personal level, and what are "needful expenses", which led to the participants' desire to have more education on personal financial planning.

Growth in Taiwan

In collaboration with Mrs. Jean Hsiou-Chung Boone, the Deputy Trustee for Taiwan, the National Assembly organized a large conference in Taichung on 25 March 2007 to educate the friends on the importance of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and the different Bahá'í Funds.

The National Assembly supported the Deputy Trustee by sending out invitations and announcements in the National Newsletter. Mrs. Boone stated that there was a "spiritual vibration" in the air even before the conference started. The morning sessions were devoted to the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and afternoon sessions focused on the various Funds of the Faith.

Dr. Alí-Muḥammad Varqá graciously sent a message to the conference encouraging those present to organize seminars, conferences, and deepening classes on Ḥuqúqu'lláh to such an extent that this law of God will be made known and put into practice in most parts of the earth.

Mrs. Zena Sorabjee from the Indian Subcontinent Board accepted the invitation of the National Assembly to be the keynote speaker and shared many inspiring stories. Ms. Rosalie Tran, representing the Regional Board of Trustees for East Asia, also participated in the conference.

Over eighty adults attended and there was a separate programme for the children. Mrs. Boone reported that it was an "eye-opener for some friends who understood for the first time the importance of this law, what it means for the future of humanity, and how to calculate their payments". An added feature of the conference was the open session. The friends asked many questions and were touched by the responses. Several enquiries on how to make payments were made; one friend, when sending in his payment, made a special note stating that his payment was "paid with utmost joy, radiance, and happiness".

News in brief

Brazil

A three-hour workshop on the Right of God was held at the winter school in Brazil. The participants were primarily youth, mainly from different parts of Brazil, and some from abroad. At the end of the meeting one of the young participants commented that each time she participated in a study about Ḥuqúqu'lláh, her enthusiasm about teaching the Faith increased, since she increasingly became aware of how we Bahá'ís have with us the solution to many problems that the world faces today.

(Taiwan Funds Education and Ḥuqúq conference session.)

Germany

Deputy Trustee Mrs. Kerstin Poschmann and Representative Dr. Hellmut Schmidt facilitated a session with the youth attending the National Convention in Germany. The thirty youth who attended had many questions. After the deepening the youth spontaneously invited them to join the other youth sessions held during the Convention.

India

More than seventy friends from Banthra, Bidhuna, Chandigarh, Delhi, Gorakhpur, Kakori, Kerakat, Lucknow, and Varanasi participated in a conference on 25 March 2007 organized by the Regional Board of the Trustees for the Indian Subcontinent in collaboration with the Regional Bahá'í Council of Delhi, Uttark, and Uttar Pradesh. Dr. Shirin Mahalati, one of the members of the Board, conducted the program using a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation outlined the significance of this law of Bahá'u'lláh in great detail and how Ḥuqúqu'lláh can be calculated. Of note was the large number of questions asked, showing the participants' desire for a deeper understanding of the law. More than thirty-five believers expressed their desire to participate in future programs of this nature. At the end of the conference, four friends spontaneously paid their Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

Leeward Islands

On 11 March 2007, the first of three conferences for the Leeward Islands was held at the Bahá'í Centre in Antigua. The sessions were conducted by Deputy Trustee Deborah Eckert. Three members of the National Assembly and an Auxiliary Board member were present. Subsequent to watching the DVD of the talk by Mr. 'Alí Nakhjavání discussions covered several aspects of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, specifically including the new procedures for transmitting funds. Miss Eckert reported that there was a great sincerity of interest from the attendees.

Germany

Mrs. Barbara Peseschkian, a Representative from Germany, made a presentation at the National Convention providing information about the new structure of the institution. A special handout was prepared and distributed to the delegates and those who visited the display. Many believers took a pamphlet entitled "The Bounties of the Right of God", containing quotations and contact information for all of the members of the institution in Germany. A particular question asked was how to sign up to participate in deepenings in their home communities.

Unites States of America

Two Representatives conducted a deepening in Houston using materials developed by the educational committee of the Board of Trustees in the United States. Houston is an "A" cluster, and one Representative reported that he is amazed every time the study classes are given. "The reason things always go well is because the materials are based on the creative Word of God". Another enthusiastic participant stated "people tell us we have to pay the Ḥuqúqu'lláh: we already know that. What was good about this class is that it gave us the details and requirements for paying the Ḥuqúqu'lláh. That's what we needed."

Short story from the Field

The following truly inspirational story demonstrates that all believers, not just those in large communities, must receive the bounty of understanding this law.

In December 2005, Mrs. Akhtar Yazdani, the Representative in Suriname, travelled up the Suriname River and gave a presentation on the Right of God to small groups of Saramaccan believers in the villages of Kambalua and Pikenslee. A deepening was then held in Pikienslee with seven adults and a few children in attendance. The importance of the law and its application was discussed and explained. The gatherings finished with Bahá'í songs and prayers. The National Assembly provided an interpreter as well as transportation by bus and boat. This meeting fulfilled a goal of the National Plan.

(Children from the village of Pikenslee, venue for the Ḥuqúqu'lláh conference held in the Upper Suriname River.)

Children and the Right of God—

Innovative game helps children understand the essence of this law

At the German winter school, which attracted 180 participants, a number of children and junior youth attended sessions on the Right of God offered by Representatives from Germany.

An offer by the German Representatives was made to the school's committee to hold sessions on the law for children in the age group from seven to ten years and give them a chance to study the law using the booklet developed by Ms. Jacqueline Mehrabi.

The children enjoyed reading, storytelling and colouring. At the same time, the junior youth aged eleven to twelve years studied the booklet prepared by Mrs. Hermine Berdjis and were excited to calculate how much Ḥuqúqu'lláh Bill Gates would pay!

At the end of each class, the groups had the chance to "experience" the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh with a special game, instructions for which are available from the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

Both age groups thoroughly enjoyed the game and found it amazing how by the introduction of the concept of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the differences between "poor" and "wealthy" people lessened and how the introduction of Ḥuqúqu'lláh eliminates these extremes and results in justice and increased wealth for all. The children were very impressed.

The Representatives further commented that these age groups should be encouraged to study the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh because it helps to make their relationship to money much more mature.

Say: O people, the first duty is to recognise the one true God–magnified be His glory–the second is to show forth constancy in His Cause and, after these, one's duty is to purify one's riches and earthly possessions according to that which is prescribed by God.

(Compilation, 2007 edition, #2)

The Principle of Ḥuqúqu'lláh—Excerpts from a talk given by Dr. Peter Khan in October 2006 in Toronto—Part 1

We know, of course, from the Writings that it is a "Mighty Law"; it's unique in religious history—it's not really like zakat in Islam or tithing in Christianity or similar material offerings and injunctions in other religions. Our Writings tell us that Ḥuqúqu'lláh is indeed a great law. Bahá'u'lláh says *It is incumbent upon all to make this offering, because it is the source of grace, abundance, and of all good.*

There are five basic characteristics to it as far as I understand. The first is what I've mentioned—that it is an obligation on all who are eligible to pay it. Let's not get lost in the mysteries of mithqáls and nineteen percent and all those kinds of details. We know that whatever the dimensions work out to be, it's an obligation on all who are eligible to pay it.

Secondly, it is a private matter with the highest possible confidentiality and not enforceable by any kind of sanction. That in itself makes it unique. We are told we have to do it, but it is very, very private. No one knows whether you paid it or not, and if they do find out, they can not do anything about it because it is not enforceable with any sanction.

Thirdly, and this is even more strange—this is where things appear irrational—we are told that the individual has the freedom to evaluate the amount on which the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is calculated. He or she can determine the amount on which this computation is carried out. He or she deducts from it those things which are necessary expenses. You and I will have different views about what is a necessary expense. People might ask me, "What's necessary for you?" I could say, "Well, what's necessary for me is to have Caspian Sea caviar with my eggs every morning! That's necessary for me. You don't have any right to criticize me. It's between me and God." If I sincerely believe that I can reconcile with my conscience a necessary expenditure on Caspian Sea caviar with my omelette each morning, then that's a necessary expense to me. Obviously I would have a problem with my conscience, but that's my spiritual problem. So here we have a binding law in which the individual has a high discretionary role, subject to conscience, in determining the amount to be paid and how it is to be calculated.

The fourth feature is that you are not allowed to ask anybody to pay it, and even beyond that, the Deputies of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, or those who receive it, are not allowed to accept it if it's offered with the wrong attitude. For example, *...if someone, with utmost pleasure and gladness, nay with insistence, wisheth to partake of this blessing, thou mayest accept. Otherwise, acceptance is not permissible*.

Now we're in the furthermost reaches of apparent irrationality. Not only do the individuals get to calculate how much is due, but they are not allowed to give it unless they offer it with radiance of spirit and insist on doing so.

And finally, the most mysterious element of it is that it purifies one's possessions and attracts spiritual blessings, a new concept of giving. There is of course a level of profundity to all of this. It is—if we were to develop it further—the resolution of the eternal question of spirituality in relation to material possessions. People have wrestled with this for thousands of years. Devout people have given up all their material possessions and adopted a very simple life, lived in a cave and worn sack cloth and ashes, regarding mortification of the flesh and all sorts of extreme things as a means to spirituality. This eternal difficult question has been resolved through the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the law of accumulating material possessions and purifying them.

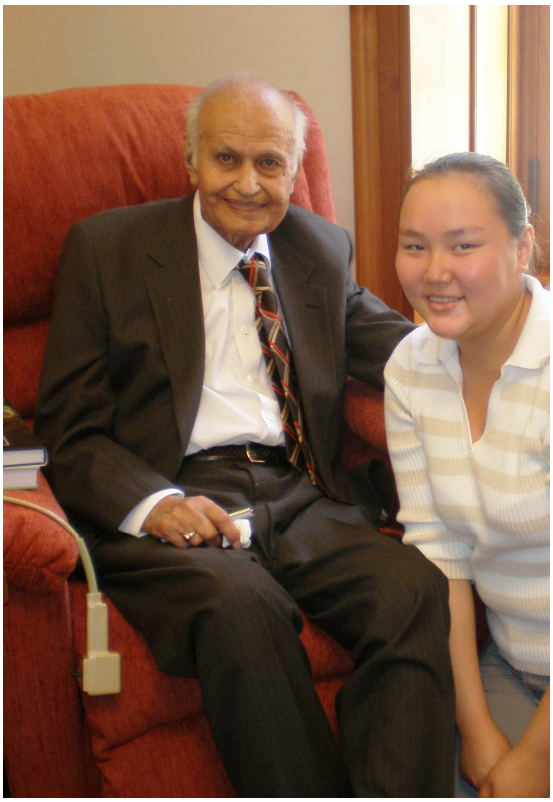
Let us imagine that we were the government of a country and said to the poor suffering population of that nation: "We're going to tax you, but we're going to have an unusual law of taxation. Firstly, you decide how much is due. Secondly, we're not going to allow anyone to ask you to pay your tax. There will be no social penalty if you don't pay it, and we won't take it, we won't accept it from you if you do it with a bad attitude." You can see we'd have a government running into bankruptcy in the first few weeks of its existence!

It is in that sense, examined only from a material perspective, that the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is totally irrational. It rests upon our Bahá'í worldview of spirit, the attraction of spirit, the movement of spiritual powers, and without that it makes no sense. It is an example of what we mean by the fact that our Bahá'í view inclines us to behaviours which the world around us, having a different world view, would regard as extremely strange.

(to be continued next issue)

Bahá'í World Centre News

The beloved Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh Dr.ʻAlí-Muḥammad Varqá continues to come to the Office to handle personal correspondence and meet with visiting Counsellors and World Centre staff. It is a source of great joy and immense honour for the staff at the World Centre to be in the presence of the last remaining Hand of the Cause of God appointed by the beloved Guardian. He is pictured here with Miss Munguntuya Sharavnyambuu, a staff member from Mongolia.



Classes on the Right of God are also held at the World Centre, where a strong culture of deepening and study is nurtured. The classes, run over three sessions each of two hours, have been attended by a combined total of 250 staff.

Visiting Deputy Trustees

The staff of the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh have the great joy of meeting Deputy Trustees when they visit the World Centre, either as pilgrims or visitors. So far this year discussions with fourteen Deputy Trustees have been held. In addition, a number of volunteers who assist the Office with translations and the production of audio-visual materials have held consultations with the Office staff.

Educational Materials

New Ḥuqúqu'lláh Compilation available

In June 2007 the Universal House of Justice sent a copy of the revised compilation entitled *Ḥuqúqu'lláh—The Right of God* to all National Spiritual Assemblies. This revision is the first major update since the original compilation was released in 1985 and contains thirty new passages from the House of Justice. Copies can be obtained from the secretary of all Boards of Trustees and the "Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh Website". The Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is coordinating the Arabic-, French-, Persian-, Russian-, and Spanish-language translations of the compilation, and the International Board of Trustees hopes that it will be printed in an ever-increasing number of languages.

Revision of the Handbook

The "Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh Handbook" has recently been extensively revised and is available for downloading from the website. This document provides a primary source of guidance on all aspects of the work of the Deputy Trustees and Representatives.

This version of the Handbook includes a section on the establishment and role of the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh; contains recent guidance from the Universal House of Justice and the International Board of Trustees; lists the revised terms of reference for the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the National and Regional Boards of Trustees, and Ḥuqúqu'lláh Representatives, and contains an index of quotations.